

Life in Light of Eternity

A STUDY IN EPHESIANS

Introduction & Overview

Studying Ephesians

Life in Light of Eternity

Life in the ancient world wasn't easy. Life spans were shorter and food, health and safety were often fleeting. It was even more difficult if you were a follower of Jesus. Christians were a minority religious group (followers of Jesus) born out of a minority religious group (the people of Israel). As such, their faith and their values were often at odds with the pagan world around them. It would be tempting, in the midst of such challenges, to feel like their lives didn't matter and their days meaningless.

But Paul's letter to the Ephesians casts life in an entirely different light. Over the course of these six short chapters, Paul helps them to see how their lives are wrapped up in a much bigger story; one which will continue into eternity. He reminds them that though they may feel small, they have been chosen by the God of all creation to become a new kind of people bringing foretastes of a better world in the here and now. It is a letter of hope that encourages us to live life in light of eternity.

About the Letter

Literary Style: A Pastoral Letter

The book of Ephesians is really a pastoral letter, designed to encourage the Christians living in the ancient city of Ephesus to "live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1). It contains words of encouragement for them as they live out their faith in the pagan world. As such, it should be read as a particular letter written to a particular people living in a particular time and place. It is meant to address their immediate circumstances, questions, and challenges.

In a way, we are reading someone else's mail when we pick up this book. There will be a lot of context that isn't mentioned directly and is largely assumed. Being aware of its historical and cultural context is important to avoid misapplying it to our lives today.

That being said, it *does* contain principles and implications for how we live as Christians in modern America. And the thoughtful reader will seek to understand how these principles might be translated and applied wisely to our lives today. For just as this letter was meant to encourage Christians *back then*, so it continues to offer encouragement for us *today*.

Author

The author of this letter is clearly identified as “Paul” (v.1) who was an apostle of Jesus “by the will of God”. What is important to know about Paul is that he was *not* one of Jesus’ first disciples. Unlike many of the other apostles, Paul did not know Jesus during Jesus’ earthly ministry. We are first introduced to him in Acts 7:57-8:1 where he is introduced by the Jewish form of his name “Saul”. What we learn about him was that he was a very zealous member of the Pharisees and a devout Jewish man with a great deal of education, fluent in both his own language as well as Greek, and conversant not only with Jewish thought, but pagan philosophy as well. He was also a Roman citizen, a rare and highly prized status in the ancient world. As such, he was culturally fluent as well, understanding both Jewish and non-Jewish (aka Gentile) cultures.

In the early chapters of Acts we find him working with the Jewish ruling authorities to hunt down and imprison members of the early church in Jerusalem. And it is on one of these missions to hunt down Christians in Damascus that he encounters the risen Jesus (Acts 9:1-19) and comes to faith. From that point on, he becomes one of the leading missionaries and leaders of the early church, entrusted with taking the good news about Jesus to the wider Roman world. In this context, under the Greek form of his name, Paul is the main character in much of the book of Acts and the author of a large portion of the New Testament, writing or dictating 13 of the letters that we have in our Bibles today.

Audience

A few of the earliest manuscripts do not contain the words “in Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1), which has led some scholars to believe that this was actually a circular letter, composed to be shared among the churches that gathered in the cities of Ephesus and Laodicea. However, most scholars generally agree that this was written to the church in Ephesus on the basis of other manuscripts and early church witnesses.

If this is true, then there are a few things that are worth noting. First, this was a church that Paul himself planted (see Acts 19:1-41). Apparently his work was so successful that several notable citizens of the city who made their money off of crafting idols for the temple of Artemis drove him out. This is noteworthy because the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was considered one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was also a thriving port city and the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor.

The church in Ephesus became particularly important to the history of the early church, becoming one of several “sending” congregations responsible for supporting and financing missionary efforts in other parts of Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia. Furthermore, this would become the church that Paul’s protege, Timothy, would eventually assume leadership

of (see 1 & 2 Timothy). With this understanding of the growth of the church, we can understand how this letter became an essential piece among the early congregations for understanding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ and the purpose given to those who follow him.

Date & Context

Assigning a date to the letter is incredibly difficult. While Paul notes that he is writing to them from prison (3:1 & 13), it is hard to know which of his many imprisonments provided the context for his writing. If it was his final imprisonment then that would mean he was writing sometime in the early 60s AD. However, an earlier dating is possible.

Another thing that is hard to establish is what prompted his writing. Unlike letters like 1 & 2 Corinthians or Galatians, which were written to address very specific problems and issues, Ephesians is more general. The fact that Paul encourages them *not* to be discouraged by his imprisonment may mean that he is responding to their general concern for him and seeks to strengthen their faith.

As a whole, it seems to be a pastoral letter of encouragement to an important and well-loved congregation of Paul's, reminding them of the Gospel message in which they have placed their hope and encouraging them to live out their new identity as God's people.

Structure

Though comprised of six chapters, Ephesians can be roughly broken into two distinct sections:

Ephesians 1:1-3:21: Chosen & Blessed

In the first half of Ephesians Paul simply reminds his readers of all the ways that God has blessed *and* chosen them for salvation and new life in Christ. He opens with a long, run-on sentence praising God for all the ways in which He has blessed them (1:3-14) and then goes on to remind the Ephesians that these blessings are *theirs*. It is a beautiful summary of the Gospel message and how Jesus' death and resurrection changes everything.

Ephesians 4:1-6:24: Living in Light of the Calling

Having reminded them of the Gospel message, the letter gets specific about this changed state with the word "Therefore" in 4:1. The rest of the letter offers a picture of the impact the Gospel message, their new life in Christ, will have on their daily living. Paul focuses on their unity as the family of faith, the Body of Christ, diversely gifted for the united purpose of displaying the gospel of Jesus, marked by his love. He then zooms the picture in closer to a transformed household living by grace in every relationship: husband/wife, parent/child, master/servant. Finally, he reminds them that their faith means they have a new relationship

with the spiritual forces of the world, one in which they are to stand firm against the powers of darkness by holding fast to God, His Word, and the Gospel message by which they have been saved. It is a powerful reminder of what it looks like to “live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1).

To learn more about the structure of Ephesians [watch the overview video](#) from The Bible Project.

Major Theme: Living in Light of Eternity

Paul’s central aim is to help the Ephesians understand how they are to live in light of eternity. He clearly reminds them of God’s grace toward them and how it was always His plan to save the world through Christ and draw all people into His family - *and that includes the Christians in Ephesus*. It is a hopeful and encouraging reminder of God’s love and grace toward them not only as individuals, but the unity we all have across boundaries and across time.

He then goes on to highlight how their present-day lives should, in increasing measure, reflect this new reality in how they relate to one another, treat those in their closest relationships, and how they view the spiritual struggles that they are facing.

As such, it is a letter that grounds everyday Christian living in the grander story of salvation that God is writing in the pages of history.

Tips for Studying Ephesians

Things like repetition, compare and contrast, commands, warnings, and transitional words are all important when reading a letter. They help you string together the different thoughts and ideas that the author is emphasizing and understand their relationship to one another. So pay careful attention to these literary features and really get disciplined in asking yourself the question, “How do these different ideas connect to one another?”

To learn more about how to read Ephesians, as well as the other New Testament letters, we recommend watching [the series on how to read New Testament letters](#) from the Bible Project.

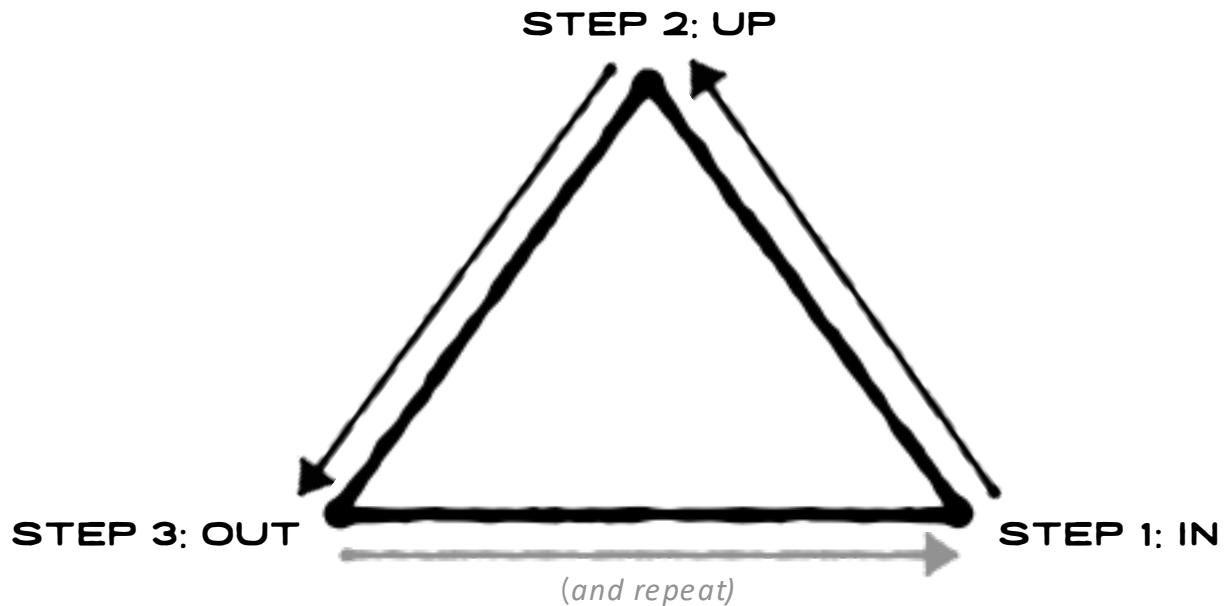
How to Use This Study Guide

This study guide was written to help you study Ephesians and apply it to your daily life. As such, it combines both times to gather around God’s Word (the “Sessions) and times to live out your faith in the world (the “Activities”). To help you get the most out of each, read through the sections below.

Since this trimester spans the summer, we encourage you to think creatively about how your group may experience this study. You may stretch all seven sessions over June, July and early August as a group and address the activities as individuals, pairs, or families. Or you may commit together to using the studies as a guide for a personal reading plan for Ephesians and use your group gathering time for all or some of the Activities. If your group members are totally scattered this summer, encourage couples or individuals to address the study or the activities and gather as a group a few times in the summer to relax and debrief. Another option would be to lift your sights beyond your group by suggesting individuals may consider inviting someone outside the group to sample our Trinity style of group life using this material within the safe territory of their personal relationship. This could lay the groundwork for an invitation into the group for the fall trimester.

Engaging in the Sessions: Gathering Around God’s Word

Each session is structured with the same flow and is designed to help emphasize three kinds of key relationships that are essential for our discipleship as followers of Jesus. They are:



We call this the Biblical Equipping Model in that it centers around studying God's Word (UP), in community (IN), for the sake of living it out in our lives (OUT). Each move has a focus and some key questions that go along with it.

STEP 1: IN (Connecting with one another through sharing)

Goal: To share and celebrate how we lived out the life application(s) from the previous week

Key Questions:

- How did you look, live and love more like Jesus since the last meeting?
- Where did you see or share Jesus this past week?
- How did your application from the previous week go? What did you learn about yourself, God, or others?

Group leaders will want to remind their participants of the vision for why we do small groups and set-up what you hope to gain from your gathering in this week's session.

STEP 2: UP (Connecting through God's Word)

Goal: To explore the content, context, and implications of God's Word.

Key Questions:

Content: What does God's Word say?

- Read the text out loud and pray
- Make sure you ask another core member or an apprentice leader to do this

Context: What did God's Word *mean for its original recipients?*

- What is the setting of the passage? (Read through it several times and the paragraphs surrounding it).
- What patterns, themes, repeated words, or images are emphasized in the text? Why might these have been important?
- How does this passage fit into the bigger picture of the book it is a part of? (Note the chapters right around the passage you are studying).
- How does this passage fit into the larger storyline of the Bible? (Note where this book is located in the context of the wider Biblical narrative).

Tough Stuff

Along the way you will encounter boxes like this entitled "Tough Stuff". These boxes provide you with important notes on how to handle challenging passages and difficult to interpret portions of the text as you move through your study.

- What was the original intent of the passage? (Who was it written to, when, and under which circumstances? What did the author want his original readers to understand? What cultural insights are important to understand as we read it?)

Implications: What is God's Word *to me* from this text?

- What, in this text, speaks to the present circumstances in my life? (Look for commands to obey, warnings to heed, or encouragements to take to heart. If reading a narrative, are there characters to emulate? Mistakes to learn from?).
- What should be different in my life as a result of this passage? How would my life look different if I were to take this passage seriously?
- How is this passage intended to nurture my faith and walk with Jesus?

STEP 3: OUT (Connecting to the Mission by Living Out Our Faith)

Goal: To determine how God's Word applies to daily life and concretely helps us look, live, and love more like Jesus.

Key Questions:

- What are we going to *do* about the implications of God's Word?
- What known opportunities do you have coming up this week to look, live and love like Jesus?
- Try to get really concrete and specific here. What will you do, by when, and with whom? How can we encourage you and hold you accountable to living this out?

REPEAT!!!

Make sure you have noted what application you are all putting into practice and be ready to circle back to it both throughout the week and during the IN portion at the beginning of your next group meeting.

Engaging in the Activities: Gathering & Scattering

Interspersed between the studies are some "Gathering & Scattering" activities. These are designed to be done either as a group (gathered) or individually (scattered). You may decide that this is something you want to do with the members of your group *or* that you want to do this with your family, friends, or neighbors.

Each activity is designed to help you put your faith into action in relational and transformative ways. Each one is a little different but includes instructions for how to do it and tips on best practices. Our prayer is that this would help you become both hearers and doers of God's Word.

What You Will Need

To get the most out of this study, you will need a couple of things on hand to help you:

- A copy of the [Ephesians Scripture Journal](#), so that you can take notes and mark up your copy of the text as you study with your group
- Some highlighters, colored pencils, or colored pens so that you can highlight and identify common themes and patterns as you study
- This study guide to help you dive into the passages and ask questions of the text

In addition, here are other helpful resources you may want for your own reference as you work your way through this text:

- [Ephesians](#) book overview video by The Bible Project
- [How to Read the New Testament Letters](#) videos by The Bible Project
- For a ***much*** deeper dive into the book of Ephesians, check out the free online class [Paul's Letter to the Ephesians](#) with Dr. Tim Mackie

STUDY 1: The Blessed Life

Ephesians 1:1-23

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

As you gather together for the first time, make sure to take a few minutes to introduce yourselves to one another, especially if anyone new is joining your group. In addition to sharing your name and a few things about yourself be sure to also share what you hope to get out of this study in Ephesians or open your Bible to Ephesians and find one verse that you have marked in the past and share it as a teaser.

Then, take a few moments to discuss the following question:

The hashtag #blessed is something that many people use on their social media posts these days. What do you think it means to be “blessed”? What does a “blessed” life look like?

After you have had a few minutes to share, it is time to dive into your first study in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus is a personal one; this is a church that he helped plant and one which went on to become a major center of faith in the early Christian movement. The city in which they were located was a major hub in the Roman Empire. It was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the Temple to Artemis. As such it was a diverse, cosmopolitan town in which the Christians would have been a small minority surrounded by a pagan culture. These are all important things to keep in mind as you begin your study of Ephesians.

So, before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group. Then, have someone read Ephesians 1:1-23 out loud, slowly with appropriate pauses between phrasing, while the rest of the group just listens, soaking it in. Put yourself in Ephesus. Listen with eagerness to hear your friend Paul’s words.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. (Here's a tip to get you started: mark every use of the phrase *in Christ*) These will all help you track Paul's flow of thought in this opening chapter. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noticed as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

Tough Stuff

Translating Paul's Greek into English is tricky. The syntax, arrangement of thought, is much different than we would use. In addition, Paul, a scholar of Hebrew scriptures, layers thought with hints of Hebrew poetic structure by sequencing and repeating thought. In some translations you may notice paragraph long sentences and in some you may see the translator breaking it into multiple sentences. The point is not to be the expert but simply pay attention. Paul's initial intent is to get you to notice.

1. After introducing himself in verses 1-2, Paul jumps into one, single, run-on sentence in verses 3-14. While we break it up in our modern translations, this is one single thought in the original language. One of the repeated words in this section is the word "blessed" or "blessing". Make a list of all the blessings that Paul lists here. What is surprising about these blessings as compared to what we might typically think of as "blessings"?
2. It is worth noting that there is a "past-present-future" progression in verses 3-14. What are the past blessings, present blessings, and future blessings that Paul mentions? What about each is so important?
3. Paul makes much of the fact that God has chosen the Ephesians and adopted them into His family. Why would this have been such an encouragement to them? In what ways does this encourage *you*?

4. Another thing worth noting in this opening section is that Paul mentions that the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all committed to this plan of salvation. Why would this be so important to emphasize? What encouragement does it offer?

5. 3x in this passage Paul says that God has done all of this “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 6, 12, 14)? What does this mean? What characteristics of God are the foundation of his actions listed? We sometimes use the word “praise” as a generality. Paul is making it specific. How does listing what God has done lead you to be specific in praising Him?

6. How would you summarize what it means to be chosen by God in your own words? How does this make you feel?

7. Look closely at verses 9-10. What is God’s ultimate goal? Why is this so important? Why is this considered “Good News”?

8. Take a close look at verses 13-14. What guarantee do we have that we are a part of God’s grand plan? How is this meant to be an encouragement?

9. Verses 15-23 reveal what Paul then prays for in light of God’s salvation. What are some of the specific things that he prays for? Why do you think he focuses his prayer in this way? What do find instructive for your daily prayers?

Tough Stuff

Predestined?

Much has been made in Christian circles about this idea of predestination. People ask, “If Christians are *chosen* by God, what about those who *aren’t* Christians? Does that mean *they* aren’t chosen?”

While this might be an interesting philosophical or theological debate, it misses the point of what Paul is saying in verses 4 and following. His aim is much more personal and practical: His goal is not to launch into a philosophical debate about the fate of others. Rather, he wants the Ephesians to know that *they* have been chosen by God.

These verses are meant to serve as an encouragement to this small community in the midst of a pagan world.

They aren’t an accident nor an oversight. Before they ever knew God, He knew them and embarked on a mission to rescue them. God’s choosing of them is an act of His love that reminds them of His grace.

10. Which of these prayers do you feel you need most at this time? Pull one prayer point from Paul's prayer and rephrase it with another person's name inserted. Add this to your prayer list.
11. Verses 22-23 reveal the role that the church is meant to play in God's grand plan. How is the church central to what God is doing? How does this change or challenge your view of the church? What would it look like to live out this purpose as a part of the community that God is building?

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with a long prayer of praise to God and on behalf of the church. It is a hopeful reminder that, though they might feel small and insignificant now, they are a part of something *so much bigger*: God's plan of salvation for the whole world.

As we reflect on Paul's word, let's consider how we might apply what we have learned to our own lives. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together. Make note of the pertinent portion of Ephesians 1 for further reflection and meditation during the week. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) #Blessed?

In verses 3-14 Paul redefines what it means to truly be blessed. He says that it isn't about the material things that you have or the comforts you enjoy, but rather about being chosen by God to be a part of a much grander purpose: partnership with God in the salvation of the whole world. As you consider this, in what ways have you been looking for blessing in all the wrong places? How does knowing that you are loved by God, chosen by God, saved by God, and sent by God lend new meaning and hope to your life? What would it look like to live your life in light of the eternity that God has promised to you?

If you are studying this passage with a group, take a moment to partner up with someone and share. Then pray for each other as you seek to live life in light of God's calling.

Application 2) The Power of Prayer

In verses 15-23 Paul prays for the Ephesians. In light of all the blessings that they have received from God, he wants them to know these things in greater and greater measure. Take a moment to review his prayer. Which of these things do you need more of in your life? Why? What difference would that make in your daily living knowing "the hope to which he has called

you”? Note – this prayer is a classic among Paul’s many prayers tucked into his letters. Make it a “go to” when praying for friends, family, church leaders. Flag the page in your Bible and return to it often.

If you are studying this passage with a group, take a moment to partner up with someone and share. Then pray for one another using Paul’s prayer as your guide.

Application 3) Do You Church, Bruh?

Paul makes clear that the church has a vital role to play in God’s plan of salvation for the world. Rather than talking about it as an organization, he says the church is Christ’s “body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (v.23). How does this change your own view of the church? What does it mean to be a part of a community in which Jesus dwells? If you are a Christian, how does that transform how you think about yourself and about church community that you are a part of? What would it look like to live this calling out together?

If you are studying this passage with a group, take a moment to partner up with someone and share. Pray that you would more fully live out your calling in community as members of Christ’s body, the church.

For Further Study Watch the Video [“Blessing and Curse”](#) from the Bible Project

Activity: Sharing Your Story

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

In Ephesians 1 Paul makes clear that we are each apart of a much larger story, and that God is at work in our lives. Unfortunately, we often miss this in the day-to-day grind of life. In his book *Younique* Will Mancini writes:

*Most people have **experienced** their story, but few have **interpreted** their story. Even fewer can **articulate** their story in a way that helps them find their place in **God's** story.*

In this activity, we want to give you a chance to see how God has been at work in your life, so that you begin to appreciate how He has guided you, continues to walk with you, and calls you to live life in light of eternity.

Instructions

Below you will find a timeline. This timeline represents your life from the moment you were born until now. But rather than putting *everything* down, we want you to think of **five high points** and **five hard times** and plot them on the timeline.

Then, we want you to ask yourself the following questions as you review your timeline:

1. If I had to divide my life into five chapters based on these events, what chapter titles would I give to each portion?
2. What lessons did I learn about myself in through these moments and seasons?
3. In each chapter, who were the “heroes”? Who were the people I admired, who supported, encouraged, or provided for me?
4. Where was God’s hand at work? In what ways did I experience His presence or guidance? What did He teach you about Himself and about His calling for your life?

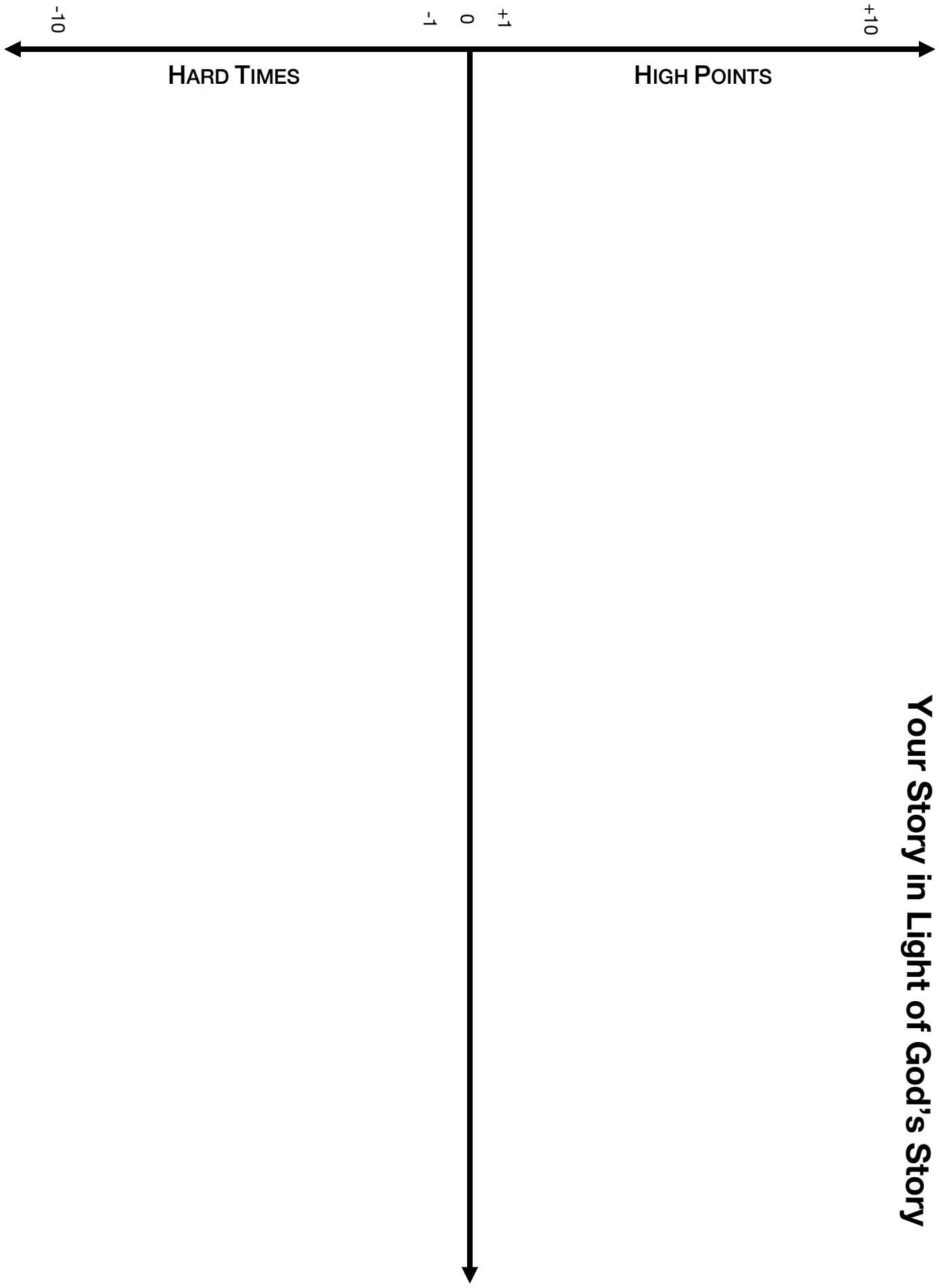
Then, when you have had a chance to complete your timeline, take a moment to share this with someone else; ideally a person who has done the same activity. You could do this with your small group, with a friend, or as a family.

When sharing (and listening) there are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Don't interrupt. Give the other person a chance to tell their story and just listen. You'll have a chance to ask questions in a moment.
- Once they have shared, thank them for sharing their story.
- **Now** if you have questions you can ask them. Try to stick to clarifying questions like, "When you said _____, can you tell me more about what you mean? How did that make you feel? What did you learn from that time?"

Finally, after a person has finished sharing, ask how you can pray for them now and then take the time to pray over them.

Your Story in Light of God's Story



** Adapted from Donald Miller, Storyline*

STUDY 2: I'm Alive? I'M ALIVE!!!

Ephesians 2:1-22

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word continued to speak to you during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Did your previous study together encourage or equip you?
- Praise for a characteristic of God you experienced recently.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

Zombie themes seem to be running rampant through the streaming culture lately even though it is a rather dog-eared classic. Characters who first encounter a zombie are shocked and have to sort through classifications of dead or alive and the ins and outs of encountering the walking dead. In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul explores the territory involving mankind's two options – life or death and the impact of Jesus' life and death.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group. Then, have someone read Ephesians 2:1-22 out loud, slowly with appropriate pauses between phrasing, while the rest of the group just listens, soaking it in. Put yourself in Ephesus. Listen with eagerness to hear your friend Paul's words.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. These will all help you track Paul's flow of thought in this second chapter. (Hint – notice how fluidly Paul moves from the Father, Son/Jesus/Christ, and Spirit - trinity designations for God.) Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noticed as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and

add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

1. The communities of Jesus followers in Ephesus were diverse, made up of people who came from a Jewish background and people who came from a pagan Greco-Roman background, men and women, enslaved people and slave owners, yet Paul opens with the word *you*, a radically inclusive term, like all y'all. What is radical about hearing vs 1 so inclusively in Ephesus? What is your reaction to hearing it personally? What is your reaction hearing it in this small group gathering?
2. Check out the tense used in vs 2-7. Do you think Paul is giving his readers hope for a possible future or confidence in their present circumstance? Explain, debate... and does this still affect 21st century readers?
3. Notice the life-giving turning point in vs 4 and the forward perspective in vs 7. Describe the kindness all y'all experience in Christ using past, present and future terms.
4. Verses 8-10 encapsulate what Paul has been saying about transition from death to life. Consider together how Paul is connecting back to Genesis 1:27-33 humanity's role in creation.
5. Vs 11 starts with the word *therefore*, always an invitation to connect what has gone before with an outcome. Often it points to response in terms of establishing motivation leading to action. Paul says *therefore* having shown their unity in Christ, tells them to *remember* the tragedy of separation diving into an issue that has been a tough one for early Christian congregations, their mixture of Jewish/Greco-Roman heritage. Vs 12 he says *remember*

Tough Stuff

Powers

The Roman world was obsessive about the pursuit and maintenance of power. All relationships were lined up according to power. Empire building was a further amplification of the use of power. The gods were seen as a hierarchy of power exerted among themselves and among the nations. The Caesars tried to take that celestial or "air" power with claims of divinity. Watch carefully throughout Ephesians how Paul clarifies the truth about power learned from Jesus.

again. The Greek word translated as *without God* is the root of our word *atheist*. Why is Paul taking them back to that past?

6. Verse 13-19 turns the corner with *but now* and reassures them within the hearing of the Jewish heritage members of the congregation, using Old Testament imagery to reinforce his point about unity. What Old Testament hints do you find? How could the Greco-Roman new believers possibly follow Paul's trail? (Ahem, consider who else is sitting in the audience with them, possibly squirming.) Vs 17 labels some *far off* and some *near*. How are the two brought together in vs 18 and 19. What does Paul call the result?
7. At many points in verse 20-22 Paul shines a light on the theme of Temple from the Old Testament, which may feel institutional, but we can't ignore the impact of the term *household of God* in vs19, linked with *dwelling place* in vs 22. Consider the contrast between the mechanical building terms and the organic growing terms and the implications Paul is raising with this temple talk. What is the goal and who is bringing it about? What is your small groups role as God's Temple?

Tough Stuff

Temple

The wonderful thing about Eden in God's creation was his establishment of a place for his image bearers to live out his purpose for them in creation and for their continued connection to God. But we know the disappointment of Genesis 3. Each Tabernacle and Temple story sets up a little Eden hope of a community/family living together according to God's purpose and pointing other nations to the truth of who God is. But we know the disappointment of those institutions and may experience disappointments in our church institutions. Paul's lessons on the temple purpose of the Family of God are important for us to consider.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Paul has been writing in Ephesians 2 about our transition from death to life, our purpose of being God's partners in restoring creation, and the radical implications of living as God's united Family of Faith. As we reflect on Paul's word, let's consider how we might apply what we have learned to our own lives. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) #Death to Life?

If you've already applied yourself to the Activity: Sharing Your Story, review the points in your story and look for transitions from Death to Life. Use Ephesians 2 for perspective. Compare notes with someone.

Application 2) #Purpose?

If you were to storyboard the action of Ephesians 2:10 with a yesterday frame, a today frame, and a tomorrow frame, what would you be writing in your journal tonight? You are not writing fiction. You are looking for the hand of God in the real details and people in your present - in light of eternity. Consider what next step is taking shape for you.

Application 3) # Family?

Paul's label of those *far off* and those *near* rings a bell in the parable Jesus tells (Luke 15:11-32) about a family torn apart when one son turns his back on family and goes far off. When he recognizes his foolishness and returns, he finds a Father who never stopped loving him and a brother who has always been near to this love but stubbornly scorns the possibility that family can be restored. The parable ends with a cliff hanger. Will the Father's love be accepted by both sons or will one reject the other? This is the cliffhanger facing the Christians in Ephesus... and your small group... and Trinity.

How is this Household of God (Trinity) identifiable? Who is far off and feeling the hostility of dividing walls? Who are you willing to welcome to the family? What person, or group comes to mind? Is the Spirit pointing you to a next step? (By the way, the cultural expectation of the "at home" son would have been to go off after his brother and restore him to their Father.)

For Further Study Watch the Video ["The Temple"](#) from *The Bible Project*

Activity: Serve the Community

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul tells us that “we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” One way in which we can put that verse into practice is by finding ways to serve in our wider community.

To that end, we wanted to give you a chance to put that into practice this week by going out and serving your surrounding community or neighborhood in a tangible way. This is something you can do individually, as a family, or with your small group.

Instructions

First, you will want to identify a serving opportunity. There are a couple of ways that you can do this:

1. You can visit Trinity’s [Make A Difference page](#) and select one of the upcoming events or opportunities to serve in.
2. You can ask your small group leader for a list of serving opportunities. These are currently listed under the “Resources” section of your small group page in the church center app or at tlc4u.churchcenter.com
3. You can ask a friend or family member where they like to serve and select a serving opportunity that you identify for yourself or your group. Calling local organizations including your village hall are great ways to get started.

Once you’ve identified a serving opportunity, pick a date and sign up. Take time to serve for a couple of hours.

Along the way, be sure to talk with and get to know your fellow volunteers. Maybe ask a leader in the organization you are serving with about why they are passionate about this kind of work.

After the serving event, go out for a meal or invite your group members or friends over to your place for a meal. Take time to process the experience together by asking the following questions in conversation:

1. Who was someone that you met through this experience? What did you learn about his/her story?
2. What did you learn through this experience?
3. What did you find personally challenging? Personally fulfilling?
4. Where did you see God at work today?

Make sure you wrap up your serving time together by praying for the organization you volunteered with and for those who benefit from their work or ministry.

STUDY 3: Mind Blowing!

Ephesians 3:1-21

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word in Ephesians continued to speak to you during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Did your previous study together encourage or equip you?
- Praise for the growth the Spirit is bringing in your understanding of the new life, new family, new purpose you have in Christ.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

In Ephesians 2 Paul took us on a powerfully deep dive into the united and active family we have in Christ's gracious love. He topped it off with an awesome image of this Family of God growing into a Temple purposed life, representing God and connecting everyone into the family. Now in Ephesians 3 Paul underscores all that was said in chapter 2 but pulls out all the stops with apocalyptic language and worship before the throne of God.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group and perhaps a moment or two of silence to settle your mind. Then, have someone read Ephesians 3:1-21 out loud. By now you appreciate the complexity of Paul's writing, so continue your practice of slowing the pace to hear each phrase.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. Note the echoes from chapter 2. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noticed as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

1. Chapter 3 opens with *for this reason...* check back in the wrap part of chapter 2 to remind yourselves of the reason. Discuss how this reason cements the relationship Paul has with his readers.
2. Vs 2-6 uses apocalyptic/revealing language. Parse out the revealed mystery and the impact it has on the family of God in Ephesus... and the family of God at Trinity. How does unity, a condition, become partnership, an active joint purpose? Use any part of Ephesians 1 through 3 you wish.
3. Paul continues (vs 7-12) with his personal connection and purpose in God's story of grace for the world. Find the two purposes Paul feels called to do. How do those purposes impact you as a part of the church Body of Christ? (Note the usual apocalyptic direction of heaven revealing to earth is flipped in vs 10.)
4. Vs 1 and 13 are an envelope that wraps the content of vs 2-12. The congregation gathered in Ephesus had probably heard news of Paul's imprisonment. The book of Acts recounts several stints in jail for Paul and there are many theories about where Paul is while writing this letter. The phrase *a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles* in vs 1 may give a clue to his arrest in Jerusalem under the false accusation of bringing a Gentile into the restricted temple complex... past the dividing wall referenced earlier in Ephesians. (Acts 21:27- 28:16) Why does Paul say in vs 13 his suffering is glory/honor for the church of Ephesus? Why should such suffering encourage them? (refer back to Question 3)
5. Paul has been talking about access to God's presence repeatedly. In vs 14-21 he makes use of that access in prayer and worship. Vs 14 and 15 are ringing the same bells of unity between heaven and earth from Revelation's (The Apocalypse of John!) worship scenes. The eschatology of heaven and earth is not about time or place, but the realization of unity of all things in Christ. The scale of this section of Ephesians 3 may just knock your socks off – and Paul intends it to and tops it off with a thundering doxology of praise in vs 20&21. Pause a moment to soak this in and share how you are being impacted by this scene.

Tough Stuff

Apocalypse

We use this Greek word to evoke grim dystopian images. What it really means is *to reveal*. The curtain is pulled back on a divine mystery. New understanding results in a reality shift...this changes everything! One particular mystery both the Jewish and Gentile Christians had been wrestling with in their separate traditions was the connection, if any, between the heavenly/spiritual realm and the earthly realm and any transitional timeline involved. That's *eschatology*, just to give you another vocab bump.

Note – this prayer is another classic among Paul’s many prayers tucked into his letters. Make it a “go to” when praying for friends, family, church leaders. Flag the page in your Bible and return to it often.

6. Parse out the details of Paul’s prayer (vs 14-19) and praise (vs 20&21). Make connections, connect the dots back to what you’ve been hearing from Paul. Pay attention to names and situations that come to your mind as you discuss and unpack Paul’s petitions.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

As we bring Ephesians 3 into our present, keep in mind how Paul’s apocalypse has merged past, present, and future into presence. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) #Blown Away on Behalf of Another

If you’ve already applied yourself to the Activity: Serve the Community, how was your experience echoed in Ephesians 3? How did God use your experience of serving to open your heart to honor another? Has Paul expanded your concept of the community needing your service? Brainstorm some ideas and make notes about further information you need to track down.

Application 2) #Blown Away by Mystery

For many of our friends and neighbors, the whole concept of God or the character of Jesus is a mystery they have never been exposed to, even though it has been an open secret for thousands of years. If you are sent to reveal this mystery, what approach would be useful for one person called to your mind while studying Ephesians 3? Would a first step be words, actions of service, or building a family style relationship? Discuss and consider your next step. Pray for each other’s step and for the person about to be blown away by the Spirit.

Application 3) # Blown Away by Apocalyptic Prayer

With boldness, knowing you have access and confident in the Savior you can trust, bow in prayer before your heavenly Father everyday until your next group session knowing you are also present with every Family of God member in heaven and earth. Pray through the petition list in Ephesians 3:16-19 inserting someone’s name at all the “you” spots, pausing at each petition to personalize the request with that person’s situation in mind. Top your prayer time

off with personal reflection on each praise point in verse 20&21. As your prayer each day shifts to a new person, consider friends, coworkers, family members, group members, Trinity staff members, a neighbor you barely know.

Discuss the investment you will need to make in establishing this practice. Discuss these dividends: your sense of God's glory and presence, the rooted and grounded nature of your prayers, the impact on your understanding of the unknowable love of God, the impact on your personal and corporate worship life. Keep in touch to support each other in this prayer commitment.

Activity: Worship & Praise

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

Ephesians 3 is one long section of prayer and praise to God. These two spiritual disciplines are a powerful way of connecting with God and reminding ourselves of all the ways in which he has blessed, provided, and cared for us.

So, this week, we want to give you a chance to spend some time in prayer and in praise. Below you will find two different ways that you can put this into practice.

Instructions

Option 1: Attend Worship Together

One way to grow in prayer and praise is by worshipping together with other believers. So, this week, attend worship together as an entire small group.

Visit [Trinity's website](#), pick a worship time and location, and just *go!!!* If your small group is made up of people from different Trinity locations, see this as an opportunity to grow and stretch yourself by worshipping at a different site and in a different style.

After worship, go out to lunch together and discuss the following:

1. If you worshipped at a different location or in a different style than you are typically used to, what stood out to you? In what ways was your picture of God expanded through this new style of worship?
2. What, during the worship service, really spoke to you? Was there a prayer, a lyric, or a word from the message that has stuck with you? Why? What might God be wanting to say to you through that experience?

Option 2: Share Your Favorite Worship Song

Invite members of your small group, family, or friends to share their favorite worship song with you and vice versa.

You can do this by getting together in person to swap songs and listen to them together or simply by texting one another your favorite songs.

Once you have had a chance to receive their recommendations, take some time to listen to the music that was shared. After listening to it, spend a little time reflecting on what you heard. You can use the following questions to guide your personal reflection or to lead a group discussion:

1. Which of these songs was new to you? What did you like about it?
2. Was there a lyric or a line from one of the songs that really spoke to you? If so, which one and why?
3. In what ways was your picture of God expanded through listening to these songs?

STUDY 4: Grow Up

Ephesians 4:1-32

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session, continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word in Ephesians 3 continued to echo during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Did your previous study together encourage or equip you?
- Praise for the growth the Spirit is bringing in your understanding of the mystery of Christ and his purpose for his Body, the Church citing an experience you had with the Body of Christ this week.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

In Ephesians 3 Paul revealed a mind-blowing tour of the eternity of God's plan to unite us in Christ while rooting us in the reality and immediacy of our purpose and took us into worship and prayer. Now in Ephesians 4 we will hear more practical detail about this unity in a diverse Family of God. The New Creation is taking shape. Enjoy the plan God is unfolding for you and prepare to grow into it.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group and perhaps a moment or two of silence to settle your mind. Then, have someone read Ephesians 4:1-32 out loud continuing your practice of slowing the pace to hear each phrase. Notice when Paul rings a bell you've already heard and plays a new melody.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noticed as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

1. Chapter 4 launches the second section of Paul's letter with the word *therefore*. How would you categorize or title the first 3 chapters? Based on verse 1-3 what do you expect to find in this section of the letter.
2. How does Paul's prisoner status give him the credentials to teach them how to walk in the way of Jesus?
3. Paul does not tuck his theme of unity from chapter 1-3 in the drawer. What strikes you in vs 4-6?
4. Vs 7 *but...* lest you think all this unity talk is about cookie cutter Christians... How does the eachness and plural use of the word gift in vs 7&8 add complexity to unity?
5. Vs 9 &10 are a brief theological aside about Christ's incarnation and ascension drawn from the Psalm verse Paul inserts (Ps 68:19) just to again reinforce the goal of Jesus' mission: _____. (are you humming along when Paul says this?)
6. Parse vs 12-16 (another bit of run-on Greek) to find why gifts are diverse and how their diversity is unified. Paul assumes the use of diverse gifts in the body will result in equipping the body for their unified purpose. Put your imagination into the Creator's mind. How does this make sense?
7. The honor/shame culture of the Roman Empire encouraged everyone to jockey for position, what honor could they get for using their gift in the community. How does the maturity of vs 15 contrast maturity that attitude? How did our head Jesus use his gifts?

8. When Paul uses the Body image, what does he intend us to understand when he says Christ is the head? Peel through the layers as if you were preparing to write an essay, not give a pat answer.
9. Vs 17 begins with another *therefore* or in some translations *now* indicating some more clarifying is coming. All this diversity doesn't mean anything goes. Unpack vs 18-24 to explain how the differences among members of the body are unified by the unity of our new life in Christ. What is to be the ultimate difference we are to display?
10. Vs 24 says our renewed spirit, new self is "created after the likeness of God" ringing a Genesis bell. Pick out the details of this image bearing in Vs 25-32. How does each point resemble God? How has that quality of God impacted your life? As we display each kind of resemblance, what is the impact on the people in our life?

Tough Stuff

The Grief of God

Ephesians 4:30

Lypeo gk, to cause to mourn.

Often as parents we mourn an opportunity our child misses because they simply would not recognize wisdom. When Jesus mourns at Lazarus' tomb we see God's grief over the whole sin/death corruption of his creation.

This thread of God's grief runs throughout scripture. (Psalm 78:40, Isaiah 63:9, Acts 7:51)

The Holy Spirit is our guide and advocate. Rejecting the Spirit's direction on our way is not a victory of independence. The Spirit grieves knowing the outcomes coming down our path.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Fulfilling our calling in Christ is going to involve a lot of walking in the way of Christ with choices of involvement and direction. Growing according to the direction of the Holy Spirit in unity as the Body of Christ expressed with a richness of individual diversity yet marked distinctly and identifiably like Christ our Head, is a lifetime journey of growth toward a maturity that benefits all. Christ's restoration of heaven and earth restore the image of God in each of us. These are complex, broad stroke statements. Lest you feel overwhelmed by a sense of new religious demands, understand that Paul is still being apocalyptic, revealing possibilities. Put his message into the context of your life and imagine what this call to purpose, operating with the power of the Holy Spirit, could look like. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) Our Diverse Gifts

Paul tells us the gifts that are given to individuals are given for the growth and of the whole body. Share each other's experiences and perspectives and apply what you have learned by brainstorming opportunities for using diverse gifts.

- How have you experienced the uniqueness of another member of the body as a gift from the Holy Spirit? Tell a bit about how this uniqueness was a blessing and how growth became evident as a result.
- If you have found an avenue for using your gift, share how that experience has been used by the Holy Spirit to give you a glimpse of Christ filling all things.

Application 2) Displaying a Difference

Even as we relish the diversity in the body, when our lives intersect with someone outside of the body the difference of a Spirit renewed life can be quickly apparent. It may be off putting for the other person or it may be refreshingly attractive. It may present you with some decisions. Bearing the image of God's love can be challenging. Share a current situation you are facing, discuss options, pray over the next step.

Application 3) Growing the Next Generation

The environment of life united together as the Body of Christ calls for a lot of interdependence and accountability as the Holy Spirit brings growth and maturity. What member of the body, perhaps someone who had another generational feel to their faith, has mentored your walk on Jesus' way? How could you use your gifts to impact a younger generation of the body? Discuss options and pray over the next step.

Activity: Serve the Church

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:15-16 that one of the things we are called to do, as the church, is to “grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

One way that we can put this into practice is by using our gifts to serve our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. This week, we want you to put that into practice by finding a way to serve in the local church.

Instructions

Take a moment to reach out to your Site Pastor or to one of the Next Steps Coordinators at your site. If you don't know who that is, you can visit the [Team Page of Trinity's website](#). If you click on any one of the staff team images there you will be able to send them an email.

- If you aren't serving yet, ask them where there are currently gaps in serving and how you can help, either this week or in an upcoming week.
- If you are already serving in a ministry area, ask who you can help train or maybe invite a friend, family member, or a member of your small group to serve with you at one of your upcoming serving assignments.

After you have had a chance to serve, take some time to use the following questions to reflect on the experience. You may even want to use these to guide a discussion with your friends, family, or the members of your small group:

1. What was it like serving in that role this past weekend?
2. What did you learn? Who did you meet?
3. In what ways did you feel like you were being stretched to grow?
4. What other serving needs did you notice as you volunteered?
5. In what ways did God use this experience to help you find tangible ways to “love your neighbor as yourself”?
6. What further opportunities might there be to serve in the weeks ahead? How could you turn this into a regular rhythm?

STUDY 5: Follow the Leader

Ephesians 5:1-21

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session, continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word in Ephesians 4 continued to echo during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Did your previous study together encourage or equip you?
- Praise for the growth the Spirit is bringing in your understanding of the mystery of Christ and his purpose for his Body, the Church citing an experience you had with the Body of Christ this week.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

In Ephesians 4 Paul started painting a what's next picture, going into the details of the miracle of our transformation into the Body of Christ with specifics of our real-life mission. Now in Ephesians 5 Paul continues to paint, filling in more texture to the contrast of dysfunctional broken creation and our new life partnering with God in his new creation. Everything in our life has cosmic significance.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group and perhaps a moment or two of silence to settle your mind. Then, have someone read Ephesians 5:1-21 out loud continuing your practice of slowing the pace to hear each phrase. Notice when Paul rings a bell you've already heard and plays a new melody.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noticed as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

1. Another *therefore* makes sure we understand that the conclusions of chapter 4:32 are now going to be carried into full color. Note the family imagery of 5:1. How does this enrich the body and temple imagery Paul has been using?

2. Detail the description of the walk you are imitating from vs 2.
 What was the personal and cosmic significance of these elements in Jesus' ministry?
 What does that say about the impact of your walking in love? Has Paul motivated you to pay attention?

3. Vs 3&4 each contain a contrast of old life living and new life living. Discuss meanings of: immorality, impurity, covetousness, saints. Why does Paul choose this grouping? What is significant about the second contrast focusing on our verbal life? How does sharing thanksgiving counter hurtful talk?

4. Vs 5&6 revisit the contrasts of 3&4. What Old Testament link do you think of with the words *deceive* and *sons of disobedience*? *Inheritance* in the Old Testament (often referring to the promised land) is the mark of God's fulfilled promise and the full partnership he has established with his people. It's less about getting stuff and more about the role in the family business. See partner vs 7.

5. The *therefore* in vs 7 marks the point of the previous contrasts. Vs 8 elaborates with another contrast *darkness* and *light* which is carried through to vs 14.
 Consider the function of light and its effect on darkness.
 Why is darkness a good metaphor for the old life and light a good metaphor for the new life Christ gives? Why is shining light into someone's darkness an act of mercy?

Tough Stuff

The Wrath of God

Ephesians 5:6

A common concept of God's wrath is fickle, unpredictable, or vindictively out of proportion.

In the Old Testament we see God's wrath operating with forbearance, justice that provides mercy for victims of injustice, containment of the effects of unbridled evil.

Woven into the wrath stories is the theme of humanity's rebellion launched in Genesis 3 and unpacked through Genesis 11. Removing ourselves from God's presence, turning from his way removes us from the community he is gathering. It is good to remember that even when righteous indignation sweeps through, God is the Rescuer is the one doing the sweeping.

6. Paul is addressing Vs 15-21 to the believers in Ephesus to help them imagine their life together as the Family of God. Notice he's still using contrasts. This is what they are being transformed into as they enact their purpose. Pay attention to each detail and pull together a picture of congregational family life.

7. Vs 4 mentioned *thanksgiving*, vs 20 returns to the subject. How does Paul inflate the general statement of vs 4? What would be good things to thank God the Father for? How does *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* suggest another track of thanksgiving? Total, complete, constant thanksgiving is a habit that transforms. Once you've recognized the mountainous compilation of gifts you've received from God, you start to see your role as a gift he has sent to others. How does this affect your understanding of the last phrase of vs 21? How does this phrase give you a flashback to Jesus' life?

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

John 1 is another example of an apocalyptic perspective revealing Jesus' role in God's perfect creation and his role to bring light to the darkness of the de-creation where people stumble around due to our sinful state. John is using the same terms we are becoming familiar with in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the call to live in light, to live in Jesus who is the light. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) Like Jesus

Scanning the texts of Ephesians, make a brief statement of what you know now about God, what you know about Jesus, what you know about yourself. With that understanding, write a *therefore* statement with details of what are you learning about living a life that has been pulled out of darkness into light. Discuss, confess, thank God, declare a next step and build in accountability.

Application 2) Significance

Paul has been making the case that every theological point he makes has real-life significance and every real-life action has cosmic significance. Examine your life for these connections to significance. Where you find significance, who is impacted? Where you find no significance, who is left without impact? Discuss, confess, thank God, declare a next step and build in accountability.

Application 3) Filled with Light

Paul gives a list in vs19 suggesting habits of filling with the light of the Spirit, a filling that is done in community, not individually. The Christian church has a rich tradition of poetry, pictures, liturgies, music of all kinds. Think of an example that fills you and share it with the group. Who in your life's circle could use some encouragement and filling? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to select from the many options one filling bit for that person. Find a way to connect with that person this week and share. Report back about the experience.

For Further Study Watch the Video ["The Day of the Lord"](#) from *The Bible Project*.

Activity: Journal

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

In Ephesians 5:15-16 Paul encourages us to “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

One of the best ways to examine how we are living is by taking some time to regularly reflect on our days and journaling can be a powerful tool for aiding us in this kind of reflection.

So, this week, you are encouraged to take some time to journal. If this is a new practice for you, don't worry. Below you will find some helpful tips to get started.

Instructions

First, pick out your journal. It doesn't have to be elaborate or fancy, just something that will help you focus and write without distraction. Some options are:

- A spiral or composition notebook and ballpoint pen
- A nicer journal and pen
- A digital journal such as the Notes app or the [Day One Journal app](#)

Once you have your method selected, set aside some focused time to journal. 15 minutes is a good starting time, though 30-60 is probably ideal. Make sure you have turned off any notifications on your devices, so that you can really focus and reflect on your day. You can use the following questions to help guide your reflection:

1. As I think about the past 24 hours, what am I especially grateful for?
2. Where did I feel true joy?
3. What has troubled me?
4. What has challenged me?
5. Where and when did I pause?
6. Review Ephesians 4:17-5:20: Where did I see the “old self” at work? Where did I seek to live in light of my new identity in Jesus?
7. Have I noticed God's presence in any of this?
8. As I look ahead to tomorrow, where do I need God's help, strength, or guidance?

Try to journal a couple of times over the course of this week. At the end of the week, look back over your journal entries. What themes or patterns did you notice? Where do you sense God leading you? What lessons is He trying to teach you?

Use these insights to guide your prayer time and spend some time talking with God about how you might like to better follow His example (Ephesians 5:1). If you are struggling with a particular area of your life, ask Him for help, strength, and guidance.

If you realize there is something that you need to talk with someone about, be sure to reach out to that person.

STUDY 6: We Are Family

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word in Ephesians 5:1-21 continued to echo during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Share a new understanding of the significance of the opportunity.
- Praise for the growth the Spirit is bringing in your understanding of the mystery of Christ and thanksgiving for the encouragement you received this week from another child of God our Father.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

This session continues the theme of family Paul introduced in the first half of Ephesians 5. Vs 1 we are addressed as beloved *children* and vs 20 calls us to give thanks to God the *Father*. Paul says that a group of believers are a family that models Jesus by living together in the Light revealed by him. Now in the second half of Ephesians 5 Paul carries the same message to live this New Life in the Light to our individual family households. Each home is a household of faith.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group and perhaps a moment or two of silence to settle your mind. Then, have someone read Ephesians 5:21-6:9 out loud continuing your practice of slowing the pace to hear each phrase. Picture the principles in action in the family relationships acted out in daily living in the central gathering courtyard of the first century household.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, transitions, etc. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noted as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the

time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

Vs 21 is the concluding directive from the careful tour of the purpose of the church in chapter 5. But Paul does not stop there, he cranks the zoom lens again and applies the principle of submission to one another in vs 22 to the family/household unit which was proudly considered to be the building block of the Roman Empire.

A new emperor, amassing enough power to make the claim of authority, is to be given all honor. He generously offers inclusion in his circle/household to certain people he considers trustworthy, people who ultimately will support his power for fear of the shame failure will bring on them. These clients will in turn ride their patron's coat tails to power they can exert over a lower tier. If you follow these tiers you come to the basic unit operating with this honor/shame mentality, the family.

To understand the complexity of this kind of family unit, realize that the marriage is a negotiated power contract, that biological relationship may or may not be recognized, that adoption of a promising client as son brings advantage to the head of the family and can be dissolved if the "son" does not work out well. Slaves live alongside the family. Good performance brings honor to the master in the community who has the power to kill and the power to give responsibility by including an educated slave in the family business. Some masters allowed a skilled slave to hire out bringing honor to the master and income for the slave. This may result in freedom.

Put your mind in this honor/shame society as you study each unit Paul addresses in the household. Christians gathered in house churches, so all household tiers there listening to the letter.

Tough Stuff

Head/kephale

Submit/hypotasso

You may have seen two Greek terms translated into English with an understanding of rank and authority. The head is at the top of the pyramid and rules all below. Those below are subordinate. We nod and recognize this type of hierarchy. But we fail to see the radical difference, the earthmoving society statements the early church, and Paul were making. They rocked the expectations in the Honor/Shame foundation for the empire and were probably the root of the persecution of the church.

When Paul uses *head* we should hear *source*. Jesus is the head of the body, the one who sourced the light of our salvation by submitting to the power implosion of sin. He raised us from the broken old life to a new life and gives the purpose of partnership... like his... with the Father. As the Spirit speaks this truth to us, we bow, accept this upside down Kingdom, and follow the leader in the path he has opened, pioneered, and walks with us. With thanksgiving and joy we

1. Examine the details of the husband/wife relationship described in vs 22-33 understanding that no one in Paul's audience has ever seen such a thing. Note Paul's use of the word *mystery* to place this passage into the apocalyptic category of revelation. Unpack the connection to Christ. What kind of conversations do the people involved in this marriage have? What priorities and goals govern the husbands' decisions. How does the wife use her influence in the household and in the community? What miraculous security do they both experience?
2. Crossing into chapter 6, Paul addresses the parent child relationship. The call to honor parents quoted from the Hebrew scriptures would ring true for Jewish and Gentile members in the Ephesian gathering of Christians. Who is the source of the promise in vs 3, and therefore the head of the parent/child relationship? A father's power in the Roman household was limitless. Discuss Paul's limitation of power and responsibility given to the father. (Yes, feel free to extrapolate this to the mother. They were an important part of the household, but modestly are rarely mentioned, especially in Jewish circles.) Children rely on their father for their, or his, entire life, so when you imagine the conversations this parent is having consider the "child" to be quite full grown.
3. Every family had a business of one sort or another. The term *duolos* is sometimes translated in English as *bondservant* and sometimes as *slave*. The choice may have more to do with our American sensitivities than Paul's intention. The family business might involve bringing in a hired hand, but more likely a client/partner to increase funding. If funds were available appropriate slaves educated for the trade or muscles for the work could be purchased and that meant they were now living in the walls of the household. What is striking about Paul's direction given to both slaves and masters? Don't miss the first phrase in vs 9. What should be *the same* in the master's conduct? What kinds of conversations would slaves and masters have in this kind of household? How does John 13:12-17 inform Paul's teaching? Sometimes people in our contemporary world happily describe their work environment as a family. How do Paul's work and management ethics hold up 2000 years later?
4. How do all of these household relationships fall into the earlier statement of Paul that all in the Household of God reflect the image of God, resembling Jesus. Get specific.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Paul is using a familiar literary form which would inform a patriarch about his responsibility to order his household as a miniature of the empire, but with a twist. By addressing all members of the household, he gives each an equality of status and dignity. Relationships have a mutuality of purpose. His continued apocalyptic revelation of God's mystery shows one more facet of Heaven and Earth being joined as the Kingdom of God in your household. Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) Family Conversations

What conversations do you have with your spouse... children... employees... your boss... that reflect your place in this most unusual household of God? What specifically are you feeling a need to address? Discuss how this could be done. Pray and build in accountability.

Application 2) Family in Action

Imagine being someone living in the Empire culture, always carefully calculating your power status compared to others, always protecting your societal status by ordering those in your household. Now imagine that you have been invited to spend an evening by a colleague, someone on your tier but not in your household, not your client or your sponsor, who has spoken about new perspectives he has been learning about following someone called Jesus the Christos. You arrive and see a gathering of everyone in the household, husband, wife, children, slaves and friends not part of this household including husband, wife, children, slaves. You listen to them discuss things, eat together, serve each other, and meet needs they've seen in the neighborhood. How do you possibly process this extraordinary experience? What would be disorienting? What might cause you to look for the door? What might look attractive?

How does this perspective inform your practice of small group life?

Application 3) Family on Mission

What characteristics, practices, speech habits of your family are distinctively noticed by families around you. What hints of this have you observed in neighborhood or school interaction? Are these differences seen as disorienting or attractive? What conversations do you have with your children about this? Do you see God's hand at work? Consider a next step, pray and put some accountability in place.

Application 4) Realized Family Eschatology (or Family in the EndTimes)

Imagine every family that is part of Trinity's Household of Faith operating in the way Paul has envisioned for us. What impact would that have on the schools in Lisle, Naperville,

Galewood? What impact would that have on the Chambers of Commerce? What conversations might come up in neighborhood groups? Would people recognize a bit of heaven on earth? Enter into prayer together asking the Holy Spirit to inspire your family with this image praying for God's Kingdom to come on earth as in heaven. Include specifics of submission to God's will in this matter.

Activity: Open Your Home

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

In Ephesians 5:21 and following Paul makes a great deal of the Christian household. In many ways it is because the household was the primary place where community was experienced and life was shared in the ancient world.

So, this week's assignment is a pretty straightforward one: open your home! Invite others over to your place for a chance to just hangout and enjoy one another's company.

Instructions

Think of who you would like to have over. It could be extended family, friends, members of your small group or church, coworkers...you name it! Then make sure to reach out to them personally and directly to select a date and time.

Think of what you would like to do together. Options could include:

- A BBQ
- A game night
- Watching a movie and talking about it afterwards
- Hosting a playdate in your backyard for their kids and yours

Try to get fun and creative. The goal is simply to practice hospitality and spend time enjoying each other's company.

STUDY 7: Suit Up!

Ephesians 6:10-24

IN: Connecting w/Each Other

To open your session continue to get to know each other by sharing:

- How the implications of God's Word in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 continued to echo during your time apart.
- How you had an opportunity to look, live, and love like Jesus recently. Share a new understanding of the significance of the opportunity.
- Praise for signs of the Spirit in action in your household relationships.

UP: Connecting w/God Through Scripture

Paul has been using apocalyptic language throughout his letter to the Ephesians. He has been telling them how Jesus the Christ has brought about a new life in them. There is a new humanity in their corporate entity, the Body of Christ. Paul wants this community to know that their real enemy is not other humans. This may be frightening news to people already weary from oppression. Chapter 6:10-24 Adds the finishing touch to his revelation by assuring them about the far superior power accessible to them.

Before diving into the text, take a moment to pray as a group and perhaps a moment or two of silence to settle your mind. Then, have someone read Ephesians 6:10-24 out loud continuing your practice of slowing the pace to hear each phrase. Picture the principles in action in the context of the whole letter to the Ephesians.

Next, open your Bible and take some time to individually make note of some observations. Make sure you slow down to look for connecting words and ideas, repeated phrases, from elsewhere in the letter, transitions, etc. Write down any words, phrases, or ideas that specifically jumped out to you. Record any questions raised by these observations.

Bring everyone back together so the group can share what they noted as they read through the text on their own. If there are specific questions that were raised, write them down and add them to the mix as you work through the questions below. If they aren't answered by the time you get to the end of the study, circle back to them before diving into application.

1. Paul knows that what he has been saying about their role as the Body of Christ, the Family of God may set them back on their heels a bit. They well know when someone

of influence in Ephesus has been rubbed the wrong way by the mutuality of their faith family. Review how Paul repeatedly used the phrase *in Jesus* or *in the Lord* in this letter. Pick out a few to hear what will be echoing in their mind when he uses it here in vs 10 and discuss the impact of that connection. How does the use of the word *power* here prepare them for what comes in the next verses?

2. Vs 11 What were they told to *put on* in 4:24? What clue does that give you about who originally wore this armor and faced the schemes of the devil?

3. The list of opponents in vs 11- 13 carries on Paul's point that the role of the church is to be involved with the transformation and union of heaven and earth means we are living on an end times stage. Their opposition is from the forces that have been messing with God's creation from the beginning. How would this information adjust their response to the pressures they are facing? Twice... vs 11 and vs 13 Paul says put on *the whole armor*. Discuss the effectiveness of individual pieces versus wearing the whole suit. *Stand firm* also appears twice... vs 11 and vs 13. What extended message comes the second time? Discuss the value of simply holding ground when attacked. Someone might be able to give an example from history.

Tough Stuff

Cosmic Powers
Kosmokrator

Power is exerted as influence in the larger social, economic, political, religious forces that govern and shape our human existence. Making a living as an influencer is no new thing. But influence is not limited to this earthly meaning. On the cosmic level of the Biblical worldview there are spiritual influencers that twist the wholesome purpose of our leading institutions toward evil, the rebellion against God's way, against his Kingdom.

4. Vs 14 begins with one more *stand* and our familiar *therefore*. So, from vs 14-17 make a list. You're probably familiar enough with the function of the pieces of armor from previous studies, or even Roman battle movies or the gaming world. Circle the list of words that follow the word *of*. Where has Paul used those words previously in the letter? Clarify definitions and discuss the value of each. Who has previously wielded these weapons? (Hint: consult the gospels for examples of each.)

5. Vs 18-20 Paul mentions one more weapon with some instructions. He has used it in other places in this letter. What does its position here at the end of the armor list lead you to think?
6. Where did Paul get the idea for all this armor talk? Well, how does Isaiah 59:15-21 speak to you? What does it tell you about the battle and who is doing the fighting?

15 *Truth is missing.*
 Those who turn away from evil make themselves victims.

The LORD sees it, and he's angry
 because there's no justice.

16 *He sees that there's no one to help.*
 He's astounded that there's no one to intercede.
 So with his own power he wins a victory.
 His righteousness supports him.

17 *He puts on righteousness like a coat of armor*
 and a helmet of salvation on his head.
 He wears clothes of vengeance.
 He wraps himself with fury as a coat.

18 *He will pay them back according to their deeds.*
 He will pay back his opponents with wrath and punish his enemies.
 He will pay back the people who live on the coastlands.

19 *The people of the west will fear the name of the LORD.*
 Those in the east will fear his glory.
 He will come like a rushing stream.
 The wind of the LORD pushes him.

20 *"Then a Savior will come to Zion,*
 to those in Jacob who turn from rebellion," declares the LORD.

21 *"This is my promise to them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my*
 words that I put in your mouth will not leave you. They will be with your children
 and your grandchildren permanently," says the LORD.

7. Paul closes the letter in vs 21-23 with comfort for those who worry about his daily details. He assures them of the help he has had and shares that help by sending Tychicus with the letter. He closes with a final benediction. Circle the key words from the letter appearing in vs 23&24 that are embedded as shorthand. Discuss their full meaning to find the full richness of this benediction Paul sends to his well-loved family of faith.

OUT: Connecting w/the Mission

Our passage in Ephesians is a sober assessment of the struggle we are engaged in as we live a new life in the now of the Kingdom while the powers say not yet. Some may find the use of the term *struggle* surprising. They may find it difficult to pray or worship regularly, and of course it's difficult to forgive people, but isn't that normal? N.T. Wright likens this mindset to soldiers on the front lines, fighting in a fog, unaware of the full theater of war and often working without a full supply. We need to hear Paul's admonition to see the whole picture, to put on the whole armor and stand firm.

Pick one of the applications below and reflect on it together or break out into partners. Then pray for one another as you seek to live out what you have learned in the week ahead.

Application 1) Recognize Attacks

Paul clearly sees the Ephesian's opposition in the same light as the forces of evil that put Jesus on the cross. While his resurrection is a complete victory, these forces will not relent until the victorious King returns with all of heaven in train to reclaim, recreate the earth. They will continue to refute any appearance of a new unity, new humanity drawn from the preaching of the gospel. It may be in a full-frontal attack by earthly authorities, or in oblique form of discouragement or distraction or an age-old temptation. How does Paul's cosmic understanding of the battle resonate for you? Are you, or someone you are connected with under a frontal attack? What discouragement or distraction are you recognizing out of the corner of your eye?

How does knowing you are equipped with the armor of God, the tools Jesus used in his confrontation with evil, affect your approach to your mission as a member of the Body of Christ?

Discuss your different situations openly, pray for each other thanking God for armor.

Application 2) Put on the Whole Armor

We may thrill at the idea of swinging swords and the clash of battle simply because we've been schooled by fantasy genre. These defensive weapons enable us to hold on and stay safe under the attack. We are holding the line awaiting the Victor to verify his victory. So... put on the armor! Does one piece feel more comfortable than others? Is there one you don't understand or have considered insignificant? Are you fluent in speaking the Word of the Gospel? Discuss, make a plan, pray, arrange accountability.

Application 3) Stand Firm Be Not Dismayed

Holding the shield line certainly takes fortitude, concentration and awareness of your shield partners. Holding on while reinforcements arrive takes patience, trust and a dash of peace. Consider where you each are standing firm. How can you form a shield line together? Look

closely at 6:23&24. Write it paraphrased and expanded for someone in the group. Give it to them with a promise to pray daily.

Activity: Prayer Walk

Gathered & Scattered

Introduction

In Ephesians 6 Paul reminds us that we are in a spiritual battle and one of the ways he encourages us to fight it is to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (v.18).

To that end, this week you are encouraged to go on a prayer walk around your neighborhood. A prayer walk is just a simple way of lifting up the community around you and asking God to expand your heart for those who live right around you.

Below you will find some instructions for taking a prayer walk.

Instructions

A prayer walk is something you can do with a group of people or individually. If you decide to do this with a group, break up into pairs. Decide where each pair will walk, where you will meet back up, and at what time.

Doing a prayer walk involves just a couple of simple steps:

Ask God to Reveal

Read Acts 4:24-31

Praise—sing or listen to a few songs with your team that help you praise God. Ask God what He’s already doing in this place. Do some listening prayer, asking God questions and writing down anything you hear or feel.

- Lord, what do you desire for this place or this community?
- Where are you already at work?
- What are the barriers to your work here?

Ask God to Renew

Read Acts 2:37-41

- Pray for renewal of your own faith. Pray for God to move deeply in your own heart. Ask Him to renew your own faith of what He can do and what He wants to in your neighborhood.

- Pray opposites. Did God reveal any barriers to you when you asked Him to reveal insights? Pray that the opposite would happen for each barrier.
- Pray over the places where your community gathers. These could be parks or playgrounds, schools or community centers, shops or restaurants. Are there any specific places that may need prayer? Go to those places and pray for them. Pray that God would renew those places.

Ask God for Revival

- Pray and listen. Ask God to show you what revival would look like in your community. Write down anything you see or feel.
- Pray for your fellow Christians. Pray that Christians already in this place would be bold, have faith, and be courageous. If there are any Christian groups or churches, pray this for them as well.
- Pray for people in power. Pray for village officials, administrators, police and firefighters, and other leaders in the community.
- Take a step of faith. Ask God to lead you to particular people in your community. If you feel so bold, maybe stop by or send them a text asking how you can pray for them

Conclude in a time of thanksgiving, thanking God for what He showed you and asking Him to continue to move in and through you as you live out your calling to be a witness in the community where you live.